Law Group Asks Burka Investigation

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A group of activist lawyers called yesterday for a judicial investigation of the "racial attitudes and conduct" of Suprior Court Judge Alfred Burka.

The group, the Washington Council of Lawyers, also said it was going to investigate the "performance and competence" of all Superior Court judges.

The council said its investigation of Burka was prompted in part by remarks made by the judge from the bench on Sept. 21.

The council said the judge made "totally irrelevant and extremely objectionable remarks regarding the race of the defendant. . . . These statements . . . draw into question Judge Burka's understanding of the social forces in the community whose members he is called upon to judge, and demonstrate a disturbing insensitivity to the feeling and attitudes of the black community.

"At the worst, his remarks indicate a deeply felt racial prejudice, which no black litigant or lawyer should have to withstand. If these remarks do indicate racial prejudice, Judge Burka should not be permitted to sit one more day in cases involving black citizens," the council statement said.

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Law Activists Call For Burka Inquiry

BURKA, From B1

The remarks in question were made by Burka before he released on probation James L. Robinson, who had pleaded guilty of receiving stolen property. Robinson is black.

The judge, according to the transcript of the case, said in part to Robinson: "Now I'm not one of those that believes black is beautiful. Black can be beautiful, maybe along with white and pink and everything else, but there is nothing that makes me madder than to have somebody have one of those bumper stickers that says 'Black Is Beautiful,' and generally those are the ones that are making it ugly. . . .

"As a matter of fact I'd go so far to say that black is not beautiful and let me say as far as I am concerned, right now black is pretty ugly based on my experience with a few people and, very frankly, you're one of those."

In an interview yesterday, Burka said, "I may have said it. But you say a lot of things when you don't get a chance to reflect on your statements."

He said his remarks were not intended as a general racial aspersion. "If I could rewrite my statement," he said, "there would not be any problem. . . . When Delegate Fauntroy says black is beautiful, I accept it. When it is applied to Martin Luther King, I accept it. 'Black is beautiful' as a relection of the poor guy who has to work in the subway hole, that's good. But when certain arrogant people shout the slogan, I don't accept that."

Burka said yesterday that he had been saying "the same thing for four years," and no defendant or his lawyer has ever asked to have a case placed before another judge on the ground that Burka was racially prejudiced.

Of the Washington Council of Lawyers, Burka said: "If they want an investigation, I would not be afraid of it. But I would not welcome it, because the council is a group of self-centered publicity seekers. . . . I have never heard of it, nor have I ever heard of its members."

He also said "there's no need for an investigation of Superior Court. . . . I can't conceive of a better court in the United States."

The call for investigation was made at a press conference at the District Building by Russell B. Stevenson Jr., interim chairman of the council, which he said has about 325 members.

Stevenson said "there are many lawyers who feel Judge Burka is among the better judges in the judicial system . . . we can't say on the basis of one remark that that is enough to establish that Judge Burka is a racist."